

THE PROBLEM:

The Lower Merion School Board is taking the final steps to begin construction of two new high schools at a projected program cost of \$238 million. This and other spending decisions are projected to increase school taxes 49% by 2011. The board is doing this without any credible input from the community. The Community Advisory Committee (CAC) that the board formed to "advise them" on the need for one school or two was given inaccurate information. The CAC recommendation was to construct two schools at a cost of \$150 million. During the last school board election, the parties cut a political deal that resulted in four candidates for four positions, taking away the voters ability to have input on the board's agenda. The school board has taken the CAC recommendation and the results of this previous (non-)election as a mandate to build two new schools at any cost.

The first of two to be constructed, the new Harriton high school project will cost \$98 million. On September 21st, the district held the only public hearing on the project required by law. After the meeting, during which 75% of those who spoke demanded a referendum stating strong objections to the project based on its size and cost, superintendent Jamie Savedoff told the Main Line Times that there is no need for a referendum, stating: "We've gone through the planning process. It's time to build these schools." We believe that the board has no right to ignore the public's input. Still, he may be on firm legal ground unless the public at large demands otherwise. If you want to know more, contact us at the Email Me link at www.lmsd.info.

THE SOLUTION:

We are now in the middle of a 30-day comment period allowed for under Act 34. During this period, residents and district employees may submit comments related to the new Harriton high school project to the school board. The board is required by law to forward these to the PA Department of Education (PDE). The signed letters must identify the name and address of the sender and their status as either a resident or employee. We encourage you to object to the massive size and cost of the school and demand that it either be sized to a standard that is supported by the enrollment projections or that the project as designed be put to a referendum vote. Some key points are:

- The PDE website states that the full-time equivalent (FTE) building capacity must be supported by current or future enrollment projections. The PDE requires the District to justify excess capacity above 300 students. With the two new schools, the district's total overcapacity is 3,670 students and the over capacity for the high schools alone is 1,252 (equal to a third high school).
- 22 Pa. Code 349.5 states that the amount of classroom-type space in a high school shall approximate 78 square feet for each FTE (student capacity). The new Harriton is 115 square feet per FTE. The PDE requires the District to justify excess space of more than 10% over 78 square feet. The new Harriton is 46.9% over.
- 22 Pa. Code 349.6 calls for the PDE approval for a design ratio of architectural space to scheduled space that exceeds 1.58 to 1.0. The design ratio for the new Harriton is 1.788 to 1.0.

The District can not justify these large variations but the PDE may be willing to allow them.

YOU ONLY HAVE UNTIL OCTOBER 23rd:

The total number of submissions received is important. **EACH RESIDENT SHOULD SEND HIS OR HER OWN LETTER.** Mail or deliver signed letters (no email) by 2:00 PM on Monday, October 23, 2006 to:

Ms. Jane C. Guelich, Secretary
Secretary of the Board of School Directors,
Lower Merion School District,
301 East Montgomery Avenue, Ardmore, PA 19003

Please transmit a copy of your letter to lmsdbudget.reform@verizon.net or via the Email Me link at www.lmsd.info. Or simply notify us that you sent one. We will track the letters and ensure that they are submitted to the PDE in accordance with the regulations. **A SAMPLE LETTER IS AVAILABLE AT www.lmsd.info.**

FIND OUT WHY YOU SHOULD BE CONCERNED:

Visit www.lmsd.info often to remain informed. The Township's future depends on your voice being heard.